



# Hannah Lovegrove

## A quick and simple morning stretch routine.

Bear in mind this is about *extension*, not tension, so don't grip your muscles, but instead, *squeeze* your joints and *extend* your limbs. Check you are not holding your breath or clenching your teeth. Keep your face passive, and your eyes soft. Work gently into, holding and out of the postures, keeping your breathing smooth and natural and your jaw relaxed. This has a calming, energizing effect on the body and mind. It improves mental clarity and focus.

The routine should take about 5-8 minutes. You can lengthen or shorten the routine as you wish, using the number of breaths you count during the poses (1 breath = a soft slow inhalation and exhalation). Once you are familiar with the routine, you will begin to work in a more intuitive way, repeating the poses if you feel you need to.

**You will need a yoga mat, a strap, a chair, a wall or door, and a block for your feet if you are under 5'6".**



### Tadasana to a wall.

Face a wall or a door, with your feet about 8 inches away. Without leaning your body on the wall, stretch your arms up and press your hands into the wall. Working from your feet, feel your body stretch and align itself, pressing your thighs back, pressing your tailbone towards the wall and drawing your shoulder blades down your back. Squeeze your outer elbows towards each other, and stretch your palms and fingers up. Keep your breathing soft and your jaw relaxed. Hold for 3 breaths.

### Adho Mukha Svanasana

Put a chair on your mat. Hold the sides of your chair and walk your feet slowly back until your body and arms are at full stretch, with your feet hip width apart and parallel. Grip the sides of the chair and straighten your arms more, rolling your shoulders away from your neck and feel the sides of your body begin to stretch. When your back is flat and your legs are vertical, your head between your arms, you will feel your trunk begin to extend deeply as your spine lengthens. Now work back



up from your heels, pressing them down, stretching your calves, opening the backs of your knees, and pressing your thighs back. Tuck your shoulder blades in more, squeezing your elbows towards each other and rolling the upper arms and shoulders outwards. Keep your breathing soft and your neck and jaw relaxed for 3 breaths. Walk towards your hands to come up.



### **Uttitha Hasta Padangusthasana 1**

Stand facing the chair, put your left heel on the seat. Use a strap or tie round the sole of the foot and hold firmly in each hand for balance. Straighten your right standing leg by tightening the kneecap and pressing the thigh firmly back. Pushing into your left heel, straighten the left leg, open the back of your knee and pull up your kneecap. Hold for 3 breaths, then swap sides. Do each side twice.

Over time, you can work up to putting your heel onto a higher lift, by adding blocks to the chair seat or using a table, but don't rush things – it's never worth it!

### **Simple Bharadvajasana**



Sit sideways on the chair, feet flat on the floor and knees pressed together, with the back of the chair to your right. (If your feet don't reach the floor, place a block under your feet.) Keeping your knees and hips steady, turn your trunk towards the back of the chair and hold with both hands. Keeping your knees and thighs together, push gently with the right hand and pull with the left, so your trunk turns and your spine revolves to the right. Keep your shoulders level, breathe steadily, and keep your chin in line with your breastbone. Hold for 3 breaths. Slowly turn to the front and pause for a breath. Swivel round on the seat so the back of the chair is now on your left. Repeat the turn, this time to the left. Come back to the centre and repeat to the right and left once more, pausing between each twist.

Do these twists slowly and use your exhalations to help you turn a little more, tucking your shoulder blades in and keeping your shoulders level – ask someone to tell you if one has lifted, as it's hard to see for yourself.

Notice the effects of this short sequence – you start by opening the front of your body, stretching your arms, armpits and lifting your chest. Your upper spine is taken deeply into your back and your shoulders encouraged to release. Your legs get a 'wake-up call', as the backs of your legs are stretched and your thigh muscles encouraged to support the weight of your body. Your spine and rib cage are extended and taken through a wide range of movements, reversing the effects of the sleeping position and the downward pull of gravity on the spine.

The attention to a slow, smooth breathing pattern allows your brain and nervous system to adopt a calm and steady rhythm for the day ahead.